



**UNITED STATES
ASSOCIATION OF
IMPORTERS OF
TEXTILES AND
APPAREL**

[REDACTED]

January 20, 2004

Honorable Edward R. Royce
United States House of Representatives
2202 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Royce:

On behalf of the U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel (USA-ITA), I urge immediate action to extend the "third country" yarn and fabric provision under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. The existing provision expires on September 30, 2004, but the Congress cannot wait until that date to extend it. **An extension of this provision must be enacted NOW; it cannot wait for passage of the full AGOA 3 legislation.**

Congressional action cannot be delayed. U.S. apparel importers are in the process of placing their orders for the rest of 2004. Since the average lead-time for apparel production is six to nine months, companies must make decisions today for the rest of this year. U.S. companies need immediate assurance that the current AGOA benefits will continue to be available, or else U.S. apparel importers will have no choice but to assume that full duty would apply to post-September 30 entries. Without duty-free access for African-made goods, the competitive advantage for sub-Saharan Africa apparel manufacturers disappears. All the good will and the jobs that have been created since 2000 will be undone.

USA-ITA appreciates that legislation to extend AGOA and improve upon it is already pending in both houses of the Congress, and supports that effort. However, consideration of that complex legislation is likely to take time. In the meanwhile, if orders move out of sub-Saharan Africa for the fourth quarter of 2004, chances are that they will never return because next year quota-free access to the U.S. market will be available from most countries. It is therefore urgent that the Congress act now to specifically extend the third country fabric provision, by including this in other legislation that must and will be enacted early in the session. More comprehensive amendments to AGOA, as envisioned under the AGOA 3 bills, can be completed later in the session, and USA-ITA will work toward that goal as well.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of this important issue and would welcome the opportunity to work with you on AGOA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Laura E. Jones".

Laura E. Jones
Executive Director

A large, stylized handwritten mark or signature in the bottom right corner of the page.